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AUTHOR Overmier, Mary; Frank, Cheryl
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ABSTRACT

This booklet presents 10 activities that deal with nonverbal communication. Activities in the booklet involve nonverbal messages present in the style of lettering, design, and color in advertisements; comic strips; facial expressions; body movement; idioms (such as "to be all eyes"); personal space; handshakes; clothing; and nonverbal communication on television programs. (RS)

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NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

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Graphic Design: Michele Plante
Illustration: Gabe Usadel
Writing: Mary Overmier and Cheryl Frank
4-H Coordinator: Sharon Petefish

NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

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CRACKING THE CODE

Can you guess how many spelling words you have learned over the years? Or how many vocabulary words you have defined? Probably not.

A big part of each school day may seem to be about words. You learn new ones, string them together, or take them apart. But words are only one way you convey ideas and feelings. You also use nonverbal signs and signals.

You send wordless messages, for example, with a smile or a frown, your tone of voice, how you move your body, the clothes you wear, even how close you stand to the next person in the lunch line.

NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

At times, you may not feel comfortable putting your thoughts or feelings into words. Your body language or other wordless signs may speak for you. But it can be easy for someone else to get the wrong idea about what you feel or think. This workbook can help you learn more about how the nonverbal code works.

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a

Wordless signals—like a raised eyebrow or an upturned thumb or a team jacket—have meaning to you only because you have learned the sign system of our culture. Problems can happen because we do not drill on these signs the way that we do spelling words. We may have trouble, too, because each person's nonverbal code is not just the same as all the others.

Most of the time, each of us is left on our own to make sense of the nonverbal system. We may not think about it much. Little by little, we learn to read wordless messages as we grow from baby to child to teen to adult. Most of us keep learning new signs or new meanings for old signs. This is partly because people keep creating more—just the way new words keep popping up.

At an early age, you probably learned that a handshake is a greeting. You saw other people shake hands when they met, or an adult prompted you to shake hands with a visitor. You could then add the "meaning" of a handshake to your understanding of the nonverbal code.

Even a written message, like a letter from a friend, can have nonverbal signals. For example, you may worry about what the letter does not say (such as "you're invited" or "I'm sorry"). You may be surprised that the letter is six pages long instead of only two. You may note how many exclamation points are used or the overall tone.

Activity 1

NAME GAME

Look at the lettering in magazine ads or on product packages. For each, try to think of why someone chose that kind of type. (Maybe it helps make you think of the product as modern or macho or elegant.)

Now, try inventing a design for an alphabet that shows something about the kind of person you are. Make a name card for your desk or locker or bedroom door using the letters you design.

List three things that you tried to show in your design. For example, your sign may look bold and happy. It may show your love of the outdoors.

tivity 1

xtra Challenge

Cut out three magazine or newspaper ads or find three product packages that you think have effective nonverbal messages (such as the style of lettering, design, color). For each one, tell why you think it works.

Cut out three ads or find three product packages that you think do not have effective nonverbal messages. For each one, tell why or draw a better one.

see ya in the funnies

Activity 2

The Name Game shows how words and nonverbal signs can team up to say more than words alone. A good place to see this in action is the comics section of a daily newspaper.

A comic strip has a set space assigned to it. And the reader's time is limited. The cartoonist must show the nonverbal signs clearly to tell a story or joke in only a few words. To do this, the body language of a character often shows the reaction to a speech or other event.

Find and cut out examples from daily comics to show these feelings:

surprise or confusion

boredom or laziness

pleasure or pride

anger or disgust

love or affection

nervousness or fear

Activity 2

EXtra Challenge

For one of the emotions listed, find at least five examples of cartoon faces that show different degrees of the feeling.

For a different emotion, find at least five cartoon examples that show how different degrees of the feeling can be expressed by gestures or body posture.

ACTIVITY 3: Construction

The face is a source of many wordless messages. From the time they are quite young, humans use their faces to show a wide range of emotions. Not all parts of the face show each feeling. And some parts (like the nose!) rarely get into the act at all.

In this exercise, you can get an idea of which parts show which emotion.

Cut out or photocopy the sample eyebrows, eyes, and mouths. Try putting them together in different ways to show surprise, anger, boredom, happiness, disgust, and sadness.

Then, draw a set of small faces (just the brows, eyes, and mouths) to show each emotion.

Zones

Activity 5 Extra

Ask at least three other people to draw in the features to show the same emotions. Then compare all four sets of faces.

Which emotions seemed to be the easiest to construct? the hardest? Which part of the face seemed to be most important in showing an emotion?

WALK THE TA

Activity 4

A person's posture and movement send wordless messages. Sometimes these messages are not the impression you would like to make. You choose your words carefully, but the way you sit or stand or move "speaks" louder than what you say.

For example, if you are tired or sad, you may slump and shuffle along. You may mumble and stare at your feet when you talk. If you feel great, there may be a little bounce in your step. You may hold up your head and make large gestures as you talk.

In the cafeteria lineup, use nonverbal clues to assign these labels:

image-conscious, into looking cool

tired, frustrated with waiting in line

content, no problem with waiting in line

Extra Challenge

Draw stick figures to show the following scenes. Show gestures, posture, movement, or use of space to convey the wordless message.

a. **waiter (or waitress) and picky customer**

b. **teacher and bored student**

c. **boss and eager worker**

d. **sweethearts**

Activity
Face the Mu
14
17

The words we use show the strong links between our feelings and how we move our faces and bodies. (That's one of many ways that the verbal and nonverbal codes fit together.)

For many of us, column A is the "natural" way of talking. For each saying in column A, select its meaning from column B:

A

___ to be all eyes

___ to bend over backward

___ to choke up

___ to drag your heels

___ to get off on the wrong foot

___ to keep your ear to the ground

___ to keep your feet on the ground

___ to greet with open arms

___ to make your hair stand on end

___ to strong arm

B

1. *make a bad start*
2. *wide-eyed with surprise or curiosity, watching very closely*
3. *not able to do well because nervous or excited*
4. *surprise, shock, or scare you*
5. *try very hard*
6. *pay attention to the way things are going or to the way people feel and think*
7. *force*
8. *welcome with pleasure*
9. *have sensible ideas*
10. *act slowly or hesitate*

Activity 5

Extra Challenge

Use outside resources to research one of the following: gestures of greeting and farewell, beckoning gestures, or gestures that are seen as polite in the United States but insulting in other cultures.

Find five examples for the category you choose. Describe, draw, or demonstrate each one, giving its meaning and what culture uses it. (One possible source is Roger E. Axtell's *Gestures: The Do's and Taboos of Body Language Around the World*, 1991.)

Activity 3

Excuuuse Me!

Often, we've seen, wordless messages speak to our feelings. For example, you may feel angry or hurt if someone else uses the space you claim as your own. At other times, or in other places, you may not mind.

How would YOU feel if

. . . you were at the movies and a stranger sat in the seat you had saved for a friend?

How would you feel? _____

What would you say? _____

. . . you were playing tennis and the other player jumped over the net to hit the ball?

How would you feel? _____

What would you say? _____

. . . you were playing volleyball and your teammate kept leaping in front of you to return the ball?

How would you feel? _____

What would you say? _____

. . . you were riding your bike and a car crossed over into the marked bike path, but the driver didn't hit you?

How would you feel? _____

What would you say? _____

. . . you had to give up your bed and sleep on the floor when your favorite relative came to visit?

How would you feel? _____

What would you say? _____

. . . you had to give up your bed and sleep on the floor when your *least* favorite relative came to visit?

How would you feel? _____

What would you say? _____

. . . you had to share your room because your family moved from a house to an apartment?

How would you feel? _____

What would you say? _____

Compare your answers with another student's. Do both of you always agree about how these things would make you feel? Probably not! Like other wordless messages, claims on your space have different meanings.

Activity 7

Howdie-Do

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shake up

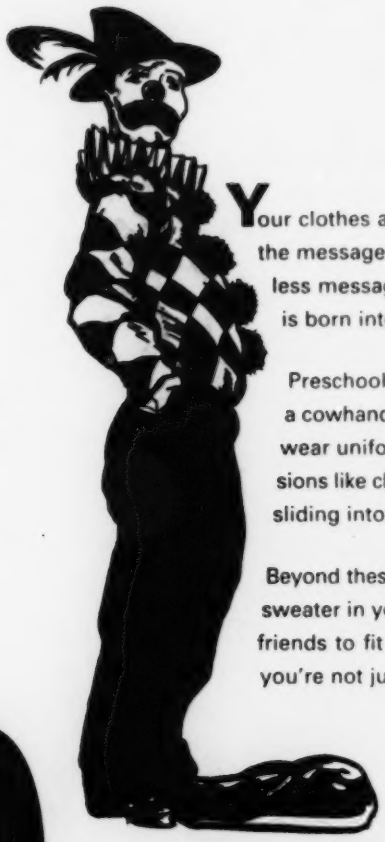
The handshake is an example of how nonverbal communication varies from culture to culture. In some cultures, you grasp your own hands when greeting someone. In the United States, many parents teach that the "right" handshake is firm, not fishy. In some cultures, however, a firm handshake seems aggressive or impolite.

Think of times when a handshake is "prescribed": for guests in a receiving line at a wedding or two captains at the center line before a sports event. As with many parts of the nonverbal code, people expect the handshake in certain contexts.

But what happens if you violate these expections? Try your best handshake in at least three settings where you normally do not shake hands. Maybe shake hands with your teacher when you arrive, with your sister at bedtime, with the bus driver, or with the server in the lunch room.

For each, describe the setting, how the person reacted, and how you felt.

2ND SKIN



Your clothes and accessories are some of the most visible nonverbal messages you send. But the messages read by others may not always be what you intend. As with other kinds of wordless messages, each person's history is unique, shaped by the family and culture he or she is born into and, later, by choices and likes and dislikes.

Preschoolers learn to identify clothes that go with some occupations—for example, hats for a cowhand, a clown, or a baker. They learn that members of a group like a sports team may wear uniforms. They probably learn that some of their own clothes are just for special occasions like church or birthday parties and others are play clothes, for splashing in puddles and sliding into homeplate.

Beyond these basics, clothing comes to have very personal meanings for most people. A new sweater in your favorite color may boost your self-esteem. You may choose to dress like your friends to fit in. You may try to be as outrageous as possible to be noticed or to show that you're not just one of the crowd.

CLOTHES POLL

Activity 8

Explore the nonverbal meanings we attach to clothing. Ask people from three different age groups about their clothing likes and dislikes. Make a chart showing their answers.

Talk to three preschoolers, three of your classmates, and the parents of three of your classmates. Ask each one to tell you about his or her favorite clothes and why that's the case.

Make a chart listing the first name and age of each person, whether the person is male or female, the favorite clothes, and the reasons given. Can you make any general statements to summarize their responses? (For example, the preschoolers may like bright colors and character t-shirts; your classmates may like to wear the latest styles; and the parents may value comfort and economy!)

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Totally Tubular

In our society, television is found in almost every household. On tv, the characters interact with each other using both verbal and nonverbal messages.

Sitting at home, watching, you're bombarded by these messages. Talking back isn't easy.

Much in the same way that you receive tv messages, you take in nonverbal messages from your surroundings all the time. Thinking about tv messages may help us to understand how messages are sent in other areas of life over which we can have more control.

Central Casting

Activity 9

Watch at least three episodes of a soap opera, science fiction, or action series. The first time you watch, turn down the sound and watch only the picture.

Note how the characters (male and female) are dressed; their physical traits and facial expressions; the backgrounds they are shown against; the camera shots taken of them and for how long. See if you can sort out who are the good characters (heroes and heroines) and the bad characters (villains and villainesses).

Now, watch the same programs a second time—with the sound turned up. Listen for the music, if any, that accompanies each character. Listen to their speeches, not for the words, but for such things as the pitch of voice, how rapidly they're speaking, what kinds of themes they are talking about.

Make a chart comparing the nonverbal "formula" used for at least two series, listing the markers for good and bad characters. For example, in one, the hero may always be square shouldered and look you in the eye. The villain, on the other hand, may always slink around and be shifty eyed. Are there markers that work differently from series to series? Or do the different series rely on entirely different devices to help the viewer sort out good and bad?

Activity 10

MINORITY WRAP

Extra Challenge

Phase 1: Watch several television news programs featuring diverse people. (Either news programs with minority anchors or minorities in the news stories themselves.) Now try to see how the minority personalities and characters are presented—negatively, positively, or in between. Ask yourself if people from the dominant white culture were presented more favorably or less favorably. How were these meanings conveyed nonverbally?

Phase 2: Watch a local news program for five days in a row. List all the "news" covered. Note who is presented on the screen in terms of whether they appear to be male or female, minority or white, young or old, disabled or able-bodied, how well off financially they appear, what they are doing, how long they are shown, and whether or not they are allowed to speak.

At the end of the week, try to summarize what you saw. How many minorities were shown, what were they doing, and is that behavior socially accepted or not accepted behavior? Do you think these impressions are showing the whole reality of your community? Will the images chosen help people to understand one another and get along, or will they cause people to become more fearful of each other?

Write a "formula" that describes how the local news portrays various groups—much as you did for the fictional characters in the action series. Then tell what if anything you would change about the formula if you were in charge of the news program.

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